

THE CONGO REBELLION

M. CRAWFORD YOUNG



The Democratic Republic of the Congo is not alone, of course, in having experienced post-independence political uprisings. The majority of the African states have had to deal with tribal or military or popular revolts of varying seriousness. But the 1964 rebellion in the Congo is clearly distinguished from dissidence elsewhere on the continent during the past decade by its scope, by the massive violence engendered, by its long-term consequences for the affected areas, and by its international implications. The evidence is not yet all in, and judgments must remain tentative; yet sufficient documentary material is now available for a preliminary assessment.

Only superficially can the rebellion be viewed as a single movement. Following the political patterns characteristic of all Congolese politics since 1960, the rebel-

tion has been marked by fragmentation, feuding leadership, absence of ideology, and the importance of local contingencies. Nearly every one of these generalizations requires some qualification, however: although the recurrent pattern is plainly visible, the nature of participation, the social alignments, and the source of leadership were somewhat different in each zone affected.

Sources of Support

Several general causes for support for anti-government action are clear. Above all, the decline since 1960 in the material

well-being of most areas of the Congo, both urban and rural, combined with the gross inequities in distribution of the rewards of independence, had produced a sharp polarization between "intellectuals" and "mass." As a rule of thumb, the economic deprivation had been most severe in areas farthest removed from the two poles of relative prosperity, southern Katanga and Leopoldville-Lower Congo. In the towns, both unemployment and the cost of living has risen steadily since 1960; in the countryside, peasant agriculture had gone into a catastrophic decline, and goods either were unavailable, or priced at a level that only